

. . . in Pakistan at least 16 people are on death row for blasphemy and at least 20 others are serving life sentences.

The severe penalties for Pakistan's blasphemy law make it one of the most repressive laws in the world. During the regime of dictator General Zia ul-Haq, the Criminal Code was amended to make defiling the Qur'an punishable by life imprisonment and remarks found to be "derogatory" against the Prophet Mohammed carried the death penalty.

Blasphemy allegations, which often are false, have lead to lengthy detentions of, and sometimes violence against, Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, other religious minorities, and members of the Muslim majority community. More cases reportedly are brought under these provisions against Muslims than any other faith group, although the law has a greater impact per capita on people of minority religious faiths. While no one in Pakistan has been executed under the blasphemy law, the law has created a climate of vigilantism that has resulted in societal actors killing accused individuals.

Despite the law's national application, two-thirds of all blasphemy cases reportedly are filed in Punjab province. Because the law requires neither proof of intent nor evidence to be presented after allegations are made, and includes no penalties for false allegations, blasphemy charges commonly are used to intimidate members of religious minorities or others with whom the accusers disagree or have business or other conflicts.

While a Pakistani court recently dropped all charges against [Rimsha Masih](#), a young Christian girl accused of blasphemy, the [outcome of her case](#)

is a stark exception to the norm. Aasia Bibi, a Christian farm worker and mother of five, remains jailed while she appeals the death sentence she received in November 2010. In other cases, militants often pack courtrooms and publicly threaten violence if there is an acquittal. Lawyers who have refused to prosecute cases of alleged blasphemy or who defend those accused, as well as judges who issue acquittals, have been harassed, threatened, and even subjected to violence.

In light of Pakistan's systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, USCIRF repeatedly has recommended that the U.S. government designate it a "country of particular concern." CPC designation aside, Pakistan, as detailed in [USCIRF's Annual Report](#), should "repeal the blasphemy law, immediately release those detained on blasphemy charges, and unconditionally pardon all individuals convicted of blasphemy," and "ensure that those accused of blasphemy, their defenders and individuals willing to testify against such charges, and trial judges are given adequate protection."